

Adoptive parent helps others master adoption

Hope Teel is a Master Adoptive Parent and Foster PRIDE trainer working out of the Rock Island field office. She is a mentor and advocate for families who have adopted through the child welfare system. Hope succeeds at the job because she knows and lives what she teaches.

In 1992, when long-term foster care was considered a suitable goal, Jennifer (now 24) came to the Teel family as a teenager in foster care. It did not take long for Hope and her husband Harold to decide that Jennifer was going to be a permanent fixture in their family, along with their three children by birth. Since that time, foster care conversion has been the family path for two more children. Hope shares those experiences with the other families she serves.

“Pay attention in Foster Care Conversion classes!” Hope advises prospective adoptive parents. “Adoption is a lifetime commitment, just as giving birth is, so be sure you’re up to it. Once they are adopted, they are your children, period,” she believes.

Since Hope and Harold had already made a personal

commitment to Jennifer as a child in foster care, it was not hard to move toward adoption especially after she brought it up. The path for their sons Kane and Chance took a few more twists. When the boys were toddlers, they came to the Teels in foster care. Hope and Harold worked with their birth mother to support reunification. After several years that goal was accomplished and Kane and Chance returned home. The Teels stayed close and were a respite resource on the weekends and were even listed as the emergency contact on school forms. Still, eventually, their mother realized that she could not parent the boys and signed Direct Surrenders so Hope and Harold could adopt them. Even facing a 20-year spread between the oldest child by birth and the youngest, the Teels never looked back.

“All of my children are a blessing to me, regardless of how I got them. Adoption just added to my blessings. However, having children that were not born to me really expanded my heart and



Master Adoptive Parent Hope Teel shares her experience as a mother of six (including three adoptions) with other adoptive families.

made me see that blood really is not all there is to motherhood,” said Hope.

Along with the children, the Teel’s definition of family has grown to include members of the kids’ own birth families. Jennifer remained in contact with two siblings and her grandparents. The boys regularly see a collection of relatives including grandmothers, aunt, uncle and cousin. This connection is important to the boys and is a benefit to the entire family.

That extended family support is a key ingredient, especially when dealing with children who have

adoption, con't.

needs on the high-end of the scale. If Hope could hope for any change to the adoption process it would be more available post-adoption services. In the area, it can be difficult to find providers for many services. The other change she would make would be to

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*Hope Teel
Master Adoptive
Parent*

shorten the time it takes to adopt. Realizing that the worker has no control over the delays, she still would like to see things go more quickly.

The time that goes into the adoption process can be put to good use. It gives the prospective parents time to get training and to prepare emotionally for the transition from foster care to adoption.

“Be realistic about your expectations, understanding that these children have issues and history that your birth children will not have. But that is part of who they are and you must respect that,” Hope advises.

Dear Central Region Foster Parents:

As you are probably aware May is Foster Parent Appreciation Month. The Senior Management Staff of DCFS Central Region would like to take this opportunity to honor and Thank all of you. We recognize that it takes special people with special skills to dedicate their lives to providing the love, support and care our Foster Children need. We also recognize that these children are your children 24 hours a day, seven days a week when they are placed in your homes. We know that it is your level of commitment that turns their lives around.

We also want to applaud those foster parents who have mentored not only the child placed in

their home but the birth family as well. It is often your unfailing support and encouragement that birth parents recall as being most helpful during difficult times. We recognize that foster parents who work directly with birth parents often spend more time facilitating visits and appointments with no reward other than the sense of comfort they know this working relationship creates for the child.

Again thank you all for your commitment, patience, dedication and support. We couldn't do this without all of you!

*Deborah Kennedy, Regional
Administrator, and the Central
Region Senior Management Staff*

Central Region coalition has a heart for kids in care

Recruitment in east central Illinois has been a joint effort between Catholic Charities, Cunningham Children's Home, DCFS, Illinois Mentor, and Lutheran Social Services of Illinois for several years. The members of this team are known as the Coalition for Community Kids in Care, and they have been hitting the streets to let the residents of Champaign and Ford counties know about the need for foster and adoptive families. Recent activities included distributing over 1,000 bookmarks during their “Have A Heart” campaign.



Barb Bressner, LSSI; Erin Graham, Catholic Charities; Cindy Conlon, DCFS; and Lisa Wade, Illinois Mentor, distributed over 1,000 bookmarks during their recent recruitment effort

Family Tree Connections supports Vermilion County families

While much of central Illinois was following the Illini's march into the madness of college basketball, 37 foster and adoptive parents from Vermilion County retreated to Urbana to learn more about parenting while taking a break from the minute-by-minute responsibilities. The Family Tree Adoption Connections support group's semi-annual retreat was held March 19-21.

"This program is a blessing. We come together with the same goals – to enrich ourselves and to help the children in our homes. We are family," said P.J. Bourn who values the connection among families in the group.

The focus of the group is to provide adoptive families with information, resources and support. Two times per year the adoptive parents come together for a weekend retreat. These retreats allow parents time to interact with other adoptive parents who are facing similar challenges and a chance to gather educational information and advice from professionals in the adoption field. Additionally, each month there is some type of activity planned for the families that range from skating parties, to father/daughter date-nights, to educational speakers. There is also an advocacy component of the program that offers tutoring and mentors for the children.

"We really love this program. It includes the whole family – there

is no distinguishing between the birth, adoptive, or foster child. And we learn so much from the educational speakers," said retreat participant Toni Watson. She and her husband Jason have two sons by birth, three children from adoption and one foster child.

This year the educational component was author Kendra Smiley, who together with her son co-authored the book, "The Journey of a Strong Willed Child." Looking at the heads nodding along with her description of a strong-willed child, it was obvious that Smiley was talking these parents' lingo.

Strong-willed or not, all children are welcome to take part in the Family Tree Connection group. In addition to the parent retreats, there is also at least one retreat offered each year for the whole family so that the kids get an opportunity to "get away" and have some fun in a local hotel.

This program, funded by a grant from DCFS, caught the attention of the federal government and received an Adoption Excellence Award from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 2003. The program is open to any family in Vermilion County who has adopted at least one child. "There are approximately 50 families involved at this time,"



The annual Family Tree Connections retreat gave adoptive parents a chance to learn and unwind. The group also holds programs for the entire family throughout the year.

according to Michael Courtwright, who coordinates the program for Project Success, a social service agency in Danville. Those interested in the program may call 217-446-3200.

Central Connections

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Call with foster parent association news and schedules of local training, features on foster families and community members working for children, photos and news articles and supports all foster families can use.

Central Region Training Calendar

FosterPRIDE In-Service Training

All licensed foster parents and adoptive parents are welcome to attend any or all of the PRIDE In-Service Trainings to enhance their skills and meet yearly training requirements.

Module 1 - *The Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children* (Four 3-hour sessions = 12 training hours)

Module 2 - *Using Discipline to Protect and Nurture* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 3 - *Child Development* - New module being written

Module 4 - *Child Sexual Development and Sexual Abuse* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

Module 5 - *Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 6 - *Working as a Professional Team Member* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 7 - *Promoting Children's Personal & Cultural Identity* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

Module 8 - *Promoting Permanency Outcomes* (Three 3-hour sessions = 9 training hours)

Module 9 - *Managing the Fostering Experience* (Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours)

Module 10 - *Understanding the Effects of Chemical Dependency on Children & Families* (Five 3-hour sessions = 15 training hours)

Peoria Area
888-507-7433

Module

PEORIA - Holiday Inn
June 7, 14 & 21 (Mon) 6-9 p.m. 8

Champaign Area
888-467-6065

Module

DANVILLE - Community Church of God
June 7, 14 & 21 6:30-9:30 p.m. 4 (Mon)

Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions = 6 training hours

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

Peoria Area
888-507-7433

CANTON Wesley Methodist Church
June 21 & 28 (Mon) 6-9 p.m.

EAST MOLINE BHC Outreach Ctr.
June 26 & July 10 (Sat) 9 a.m.-12 p.m.

GALESBURG Holiday Inn Express
June 28 & July 12 (Mon) 6-9 p.m.

PEORIA Children's Home
June 8 & 15 (Tue) 6-9 p.m.
June 23 & 30 (Wed) 6-9 p.m.

Springfield Area
888-817-1825

SPRINGFIELD Lincoln Land
June 7 & 14 (Mon) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

Champaign Area
888-467-6065

DECATUR Decatur Civic Center
June 19 (Sat) 9 a.m.-4 p.m.



Parents: persons who spend half their time worrying how a child will turn out, and the rest of the time wondering when a child will turn in.

—Ted Cook

Pre-Registration is required for all classes.

Call the number listed for your area for registration information.